Title
Simply a matter of context? Partisan contexts and party loyalties on free votes

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Abstract
While recent studies suggest the party loyalties of Members of Parliament (MPs) influence voting behaviour on free votes independently of personal preferences, it remains to be seen to what extent party loyalties influence MPs' voting behaviour more generally. To this end, this paper examines the impact of the partisan context of the vote on the effects of party loyalties. Using data from 20 divisions decided largely as free votes and controlling for personal preferences using a survey measuring MPs' attitudes, the analysis shows that the effect of party loyalty on voting behaviour is strongest under the most partisan conditions: when the outcome is anticipated to be close and most consequential to the success/failure of a bill. These findings suggest party loyalty effects may emerge on other highly partisan divisions with partisan consequences, and not appear on less partisan divisions.

2 figures, 3 tables

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Previous research examining the voting behaviour of Members of Parliament (MPs) shows that parties often remain cohesive on free votes, on which the whips are removed (Cowley and Stuart 1997, *ibid* 2010; Hibbing and Marsh 1987; Johnston, Pattie, and Stuart 1998; Warhurst 2008). Because MPs are free to choose how to vote on their own, previous research suggests MPs' personal preferences have significant effects on their voting behaviour and that the high levels of cohesion observed on free votes are due to shared preferences among MPs of the same party (Hibbing and Marsh 1987; Marsh and Read 1988; Mughan and Scully 1997; Plumb 2013; *ibid* 2015). However, a growing body of research suggests these high levels of cohesion are also due to MPs' party identifications, which are independent of shared preferences and the whip (Russell 2014; Raymond and Overby 2016; Raymond and Worth 2016; Raymond 2016).

Despite evidence that party identification impacts MPs' voting behaviour on those particular divisions studied in previous research, it remains to be seen whether these findings can be generalised. Building on insights provided by specific examples in previous studies of MPs' voting behaviour (Cowley and Stuart 1997; 2010; Overby, Tatalovich, and Studlar 1998), this paper examines the possibility that the effects of party identification vary according to the partisan context of the vote. When the outcome of a particular division is uncertain and/or more consequential for their parties, MPs will feel a sense of duty to help their party win, and thus party identification will exert considerable influence on MPs' voting behaviour; when the outcome is less consequential to the parties, the impact of party identification will be weaker. To date, this argument has yet to be tested explicitly.

I test this argument by examining a series of divisions dealing with issues of embryology and abortion regarding one particular piece of legislation: the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008. While each stage of this bill has been examined extensively by previous research (Cowley and Stuart 2010; Plumb and Marsh 2011; Goodwin

2015), this particular piece of legislation provides an important opportunity to formally test the argument above. For one, because most of these divisions were decided as free votes, this allowed for variation in the partisan context—as MPs were free to break from the rest of their party if they did not support a particular motion—that allows us to conduct a systematic empirical test of the argument. Additionally, examining this particular piece of legislation allows us to employ an important survey of MPs—the British Representation Survey (BRS) 2005 (Lovenduski, Childs, and Campbell 2005)—which provides rare, precise measures of MPs' attitudes that allow us to rule out alternative hypotheses relating to the impact of personal preferences on MPs' voting behaviour.

In the next section, I review the literature regarding the determinants of MPs' voting behaviour on free votes and the argument to be tested here in greater detail. This is followed by a discussion of the context of the free vote divisions examined in the analysis. Following that, I outline the details of the research design before proceeding to the discussion of the results. A final section concludes and offers suggestions for future research.

Previous research

Previous research identifies three main factors thought to influence legislative voting behaviour (van Vonno et al. 2014). One is the whip, which parties use to discipline their members when they act in ways that go against the interests of the party. Beyond the pressures of the whip, MPs may vote according to preferences, either their personal preferences (Baumann, Debus, and Müller 2013; *ibid* 2015a; *ibid* 2015b; Plumb and Marsh 2011) or those of their constituents (Baumann, Debus, and Müller 2013; *ibid* 2015a; *ibid* 2015b; Sieberer 2015), to whom MPs must appeal in order to ensure re-election (André, Depauw, and Martin 2015). These preferences, in turn, may put them at odds with their parties (potentially leading to rebellious behaviour that necessitates the use of the whip) or in

lock-step, which makes the whip redundant (Norton and Wood 1993; van Vonno et al. 2014). Finally, MPs may vote with the rest of their party's MPs—even if this means voting against constituents' demands or their own preferences—out of a lingering sense of loyalty to the party. This party loyalty is rooted in psychological identifications with their parties—similar to the party identifications of voters (Campbell et al. 1960; Butler and Stokes 1969)—that are independent of preference- and discipline-based effects (Russell 2014; Raymond and Overby 2016; Raymond and Worth, 2016).

Given the high levels of party cohesion observed on most divisions, it is difficult to assess whether each of the explanations above influence MPs' voting behaviour. To gain some leverage on the issue, studies examining the voting behaviour of MPs often examine free votes, on which the whips are relaxed and MPs are not formally instructed on how to vote by their parties (Richards 1970; Cowley 1998). Even if free votes are rare and usually allowed on bills involving issues of conscience, studying free votes allows researchers to examine whether other factors besides the whip influence MPs' voting behaviour.[1] Although the whips often remain active, gathering intelligence and tallying the anticipated votes as they do on whipped divisions (Rogers and Walters 2015, pp. 81-85) in trying to preserve cohesion on free votes (e.g. Richards 1970, p. 28; Bailey and Shinkwin 1998, p. 106; McLean, Spirling, and Russell 2003, pp. 308-309), MPs are genuinely able to vote as they wish on free votes. While the whips may try to persuade MPs to support the party's unofficial position by appealing to a sense of loyalty rooted in MPs' party identifications, MPs are free to vote as they wish because the whips lack the formal mechanisms they normally possess to maintain discipline.

Despite the possibility for intra-party splits, previous research finds that parties often remain highly cohesive on free votes (Cowley and Stuart 1997; *ibid* 2010; Hibbing and Marsh 1987; Johnston, Pattie, and Stuart 1998; Warhurst 2008). Though free votes allow for

MPs with preferences differing from the rest of their party to vote in ways that divide the party in the final vote totals, parties often remain cohesive. Some research argues this is because MPs of the same party share similar personal preferences (Hibbing and Marsh 1987; Marsh and Read 1988; Mughan and Scully 1997; Overby et al. 1998; Pattie et al. 1994; Plumb 2013; *ibid* 2015), while other research argues this is because MPs of the same party face similar constituency pressures (Pattie, Johnston, and Fieldhouse 1994; Pattie, Johnston, and Stuart 1998; Overby, Raymond, and Taydas 2011; Baumann, Debus, and Müller 2013; *ibid* 2015a; *ibid* 2015b; Sieberer 2015; Raymond 2016).

Despite evidence that the preferences of MPs and their constituents shape voting behaviour on free votes, the outcomes of some free vote divisions cannot be explained by preferences alone. Even when preferences are not clearly aligned along party lines, parties often continue to display high levels of cohesion (Norton 2003; Andeweg and Thomassen 2011; Plumb and Marsh 2013). Some research has argued—and found evidence in support of such arguments—that MPs vote along party lines on free votes due to their identification with the party, which creates a sense of loyalty to the party that is independent of personal and constituency preferences (van Vonno et al. 2014; Russell 2014; Raymond and Overby 2016; Raymond and Worth, 2016). As a consequence of the in-group/out-group psychology inherent in party identification, MPs will want to act in the interests of their parties even if they are not compelled by the whips to do so, and even if doing so means voting against their own preferences (Russell 2014). For instance, the party identification argument predicts that government MPs will vote to support the government in order to avoid the humiliation of defeat whilst opposition MPs will vote to try to embarrass the government in defeat (e.g. Cowley and Stuart 2010, pp. 176-177; Raymond 2016).

While a growing body of evidence suggests that MPs' party identifications influence their behaviour on free votes, it remains to be seen whether these effects can be generalised

beyond those contexts studied in previous research. There are reasons to believe party identification may exert strong effects on some divisions but not others due to the partisan consequences of the division: specifically, the effects of party identification on voting behaviour may be stronger on divisions with the greatest consequences for MPs' parties. This notion is supported by research in social psychology suggesting that the likelihood of engaging in group-like behaviour increases as threats to one's own group become clearer (Dépret and Fiske 1999; Yzerbyt, Castano, Leyens, and Paladino 2000; Jetten, Spears, and Postmes 2004). This suggests that when the partisan consequences are greater, the effect of party identification on MPs' voting behaviour will be stronger because of the threats posed to one's own party by the other parties.

Previous literature highlights two partisan contexts that may condition the effects of party identification. For one, the effects of party identification will be strongest on divisions with the greatest potential to kill a bill: although MPs may vote according to personal preferences on free votes, parties are more cohesive on free vote divisions that are more consequential to the final outcome and their parties (Overby, Tatalovich, and Studlar 1998). This leads to the prediction that while MPs may break with their parties in order to express their personal or constituents' preferences on divisions that do not directly impact a bill's outcome, their behaviour on divisions that do determine whether a bill passes or dies will be guided more by party identification, leading government MPs to be more supportive of their government's unofficial position and opposition MPs to be more likely to oppose the government.

The second type of partisan context effect is the closeness of the vote. Specifically, this argument predicts that the effect of party identification should be stronger on those votes that are anticipated to be closer—and therefore more consequential for one's party—than on divisions that are predicted to pass/fail easily. This is in keeping with previous research

showing that MPs are more cohesive on divisions whose outcomes are closer, and thus more consequential to the parties (Cowley and Stuart 1997, pp. 124-125; *ibid* 2010, pp. 176-177). Unlike the effects of personal and constituency preferences—which guide MPs' voting behaviour on all free vote divisions, leading some MPs to break with (and others to support) their parties—this argument predicts that the independent effects of party identification fostering cohesion will strengthen as the anticipated outcome of the division becomes less certain—and therefore more consequential to each party. While the whips may be active on most if not all free vote divisions, the success of their efforts will depend on the partisan consequences of MPs' voting behaviour: MPs are more likely to be persuaded to support the unofficial party line advocated informally by the whips on more competitive divisions because the partisan threats created by closer anticipated vote counts (communicated to MPs prior to division by the whips as they collect their intelligence on MPs' vote intentions) will stimulate MPs' party identifications.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008

To test the argument above, I analyse the 20 divisions decided at each stage of the debate regarding what became the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 (herein HFEA). Originally introduced in the House of Lords on 8 November 2007, the bill reached the House of Commons on 5 February 2008, was passed on third reading on 22 October, and received royal assent on 13 November. While the amendments to this bill have been examined extensively in previous research (Cowley and Stuart 2010; Plumb and Marsh 2011; Goodwin 2015), re-examining these 20 divisions allows for a formal test of the arguments detailed above. Because these 20 divisions offer considerable variation in terms of their partisan consequences, analysing voting behaviour on these divisions allows us to test whether the impact of party identification varied according to differences in the partisan

context of each division after ruling out several prominent alternative hypotheses.

The HFEA was introduced to update earlier legislation—the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 and the Human Reproductive Cloning Act 2001—to ensure that the use of all human embryos was subject to appropriate regulation throughout the United Kingdom (including Northern Ireland), both for purposes of fertilisation and research. Specifically, the HFEA was intended to regulate hybrid embryos (created using a mixture of human and animal tissue), to prohibit sex-selective abortion for non-medical reasons, and to recognise same-sex couples as legal parents of children conceived through donated reproductive material. Although the UK maintained one of the most liberal embryology regimes prior to passage of the HFEA in 2008, the government felt compelled to pass new legislation to ensure that advances in technology and practice (e.g. hybrid embryos) could be made with proper regulatory protection. While the individual components mentioned above were not specifically part of Labour's 2005 manifesto commitments, the government needed to pass the HFEA in part to ensure the UK remained 'one of the world's best environments for stem-cell research', as well as to demonstrate its continued commitment 'to improving the rights and opportunities of gays and lesbians' (as the party proudly claimed in its 2005 manifesto). Thus, failure to pass the HFEA would have been an embarrassment for the government, a point which motivated opposition MPs to try to defeat the legislation (and government MPs to rally to its defence).

Several amendments attempting to restrict abortion and to remove some controversial embryology practices (often viewed by opponents as akin to abortion)[2] from the bill were introduced in the House of Commons and voted on following second reading of the bill at committee (decided on 19 and 20 May) and report (decided on 22 October) stages. Like other issues dealing with matters of conscience (Cowley 1998), these amendments were decided as free votes. Despite claims made at one point by Conservative MP Nadine Dorries

that Labour MPs were subject to a three-line whip, Labour MPs were only whipped on the divisions most consequential to the final outcome (those on second and third reading, as well as the programming motion); all of the proposed amendments except one (Liberal Democrats were whipped to oppose the amendment seeking to require both a mother and father for fertility treatment) were subject to a genuinely free vote for MPs in all three major parties.

Ultimately, the government decided not to whip their MPs on the 17 amendments because they anticipated, with the help of a few Liberal Democrat and Conservative MPs, that each proposed amendment was destined to fail (Cowley and Stuart 2010, p. 181). That being said, the government's decision was motivated in no small part by the threat of revolt from the backbenches on announcing their intention to whip MPs on these divisions (Cowley and Stuart 2010, p.174). Although the government took a position on the HFEA, it and the other parties did not take official positions on the amendments.

Though the whips (government and opposition) remained active on the amendments, their efforts were limited to surveying voting intentions—and on the basis of this, persuading their MPs to divide along party lines—because they lacked the formal mechanisms to enforce discipline. Reflecting the legitimately free nature of the un-whipped divisions was the fact that prominent leaders in each party broke with the rest of their partisans without disciplinary repercussions. For example, three cabinet-level Labour MPs voted in support of the most restrictive of the amendments seeking to limit abortion (12 weeks), while George Osborne broke with his fellow Conservatives and voted against all five amendments dealing with abortion. The fact several MPs were willing to break with their party ranks suggest MPs were quite free to vote their consciences on these amendments without fear of disciplinary actions by their party leaders.

Similar to other free votes, which previous research notes are increasingly partisan (Cowley and Stuart 1997; Cowley 1998; Overby, Raymond, and Taydas 2011; Plumb and

Marsh 2013; Plumb 2013; *ibid* 2015), the outcomes of most divisions related to the HFEA were highly partisan. Although much was made of the intra-party divisions in the discussions surrounding the amendments (BBC News, 2008), support for each amendment was concentrated primarily among Conservative MPs: most of the sponsors were Conservative MPs, most of the major voices in the parliamentary debates in support of the proposed amendments were Conservative MPs, and support for the amendments on division came disproportionally from Conservative MPs. This can be seen in Table 1, which presents the percentages voting in favour of each division—both in terms of the actual percentages observed on each division and the percentages observed in the BRS sample—broken down by party. On each amendment, the majority of Labour MPs voted 'no'. On the other side were the majority of Conservative MPs, who voted in favour of all but two amendments (and voted against the programming motion and second and third reading). Though the majority of Liberal Democrats voted to oppose the amendments, they were less likely to do so than Labour MPs, suggesting that even Liberal Democrat MPs felt the pressure to oppose the Labour government on competitive divisions where the partisan consequences were greatest.

Table 1 about here

Despite some differences—in a few instances, sizeable—between the percentages produced by the BRS sample and the percentages seen in the recorded divisions, the BRS sample percentages are largely representative of the outcome of each amendment.[3] Among Labour MPs, the BRS sample produces percentages that are quite representative of the actual outcomes in nearly every instance. The largest differences between the two sets of percentages are among Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs: Conservatives voting in favour of the amendments are over-represented, while Liberal Democrats voting in favour are under-represented on most issues (but not as much as Conservatives are over-represented). That being said, these differences do not render the sample unrepresentative: with only one

exception (the amendment proposing to limit abortion to 16 weeks following conception), the percentages of all three party's MPs voting in favour of each amendment observed using the BRS sample reflect the actual percentages voting in favour.

In keeping with most previous research on free votes (Cowley and Stuart 1997; *ibid* 2010; Hibbing and Marsh 1987; Johnston, Pattie, and Stuart 1998; Warhurst 2008), Table 1 shows that 'party' was associated with MPs' voting behaviour. Though some Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs sided against the majority of their fellow partisans on each division, the main supporters of the proposed limits to embryology and abortion were concentrated primarily among Conservative MPs. That said, there is considerable variation in the degree of closeness of each division, as seen in the last column of Table 1: while fewer than 20 percent of MPs supported the amendments seeking to limit abortion to 12 and 16 weeks after conception, 44 percent of MPs voted for the amendment seeking to limit the mixture of human and animal gametes/pronuclei. This variation allows us to test the argument outlined above regarding the closeness of the outcome. Because MPs would have perceived little hope for the 12 or 16 week abortion amendments ahead of the vote—whether this was communicated to them by the whips prior to division, communicated by the vote tellers after division was called, or by virtue of the popularity of the content alone—these votes would have been viewed as having little consequence to their parties. As a result, the argument above would predict that MPs would not have voted out of a sense of party loyalty on these two divisions. On a division like the amendment seeking to restrict human/animal gamete/pronucleus mixture, where voting behaviour would have been more consequential to the final outcome (due to its near-passage), the argument above predicts MPs' party identifications had a stronger effect on their behaviour on this division than the 12 and 16 week abortion amendments.

Research design

To determine whether the impact of party identification on voting behaviour is conditioned by the partisan context of the vote, I estimate regression models pooling MPs' votes across all 20 divisions on the HFEA. In this data set, the unit of analysis is the MP-vote. In other words, MPs appear multiple times—as many times as they voted on these 20 divisions.

The dependent variable measures MPs' voting behaviour on each division. On the 17 amendments seeking to limit embryology and abortion practices, this variable is coded one for MPs voting 'aye' and zero for MPs voting 'no'. On the programming motion and second and third readings, those voting 'no' are treated as equivalent to those voting in favour of the amendments, and therefore coded one (and zero for those voting in favour of these three motions).[4] As a result of this coding, this variable measures voting behaviour in opposition to (all or part of) the HFEA.

The effects of MPs' party identification were estimated by including variables measuring the party affiliation of MPs. If these variables significantly influence voting behaviour after accounting for variables measuring MPs' personal and constituents' preferences, then we would have evidence to suggest MPs' voting behaviour was shaped by their party identification. To this end, I created separate dummy variables for each party and estimated two models. One model estimates the effect of Labour Party identification relative to a Conservative/Liberal Democrat baseline, while a second estimates the effects of Conservative and Liberal Democrat party identification separately, leaving Labour MPs as the baseline.[5]

To test the argument that the partisan context of the vote conditioned the effects of party identification, I interacted the party affiliation variables with two variables measuring the partisan context of the vote. One variable measures the partisan context created by the

difference between the 17 amendments (which were not consequential to the ultimate success of the HFEA) and the three divisions that were (the votes on second and third reading, as well as the programming motion). On votes essential to passage of the HFEA (labelled below as 'Passage votes'), the argument above predicts that the effects of party identification will strengthen as a consequence of the higher stakes of these divisions relative to divisions that do not threaten the entire HFEA. This means Labour MPs will be more likely to vote in favour of the HFEA (and Conservatives and Liberal Democrats more likely to vote to oppose the HFEA) on passage votes than amendment votes. To account for this possibility, I create a dummy variable for these three passage vote divisions and interact it with the party identification variables.

Turning to the partisan context created by the margin of victory on each division, I include a variable ('Opposition vote share') measuring the percentage of MPs on each division voting in opposition to the HFEA (i.e. the percentage voting *for* the amendments and the percentage voting *against* the three passage votes).[6] Because MPs are made aware of the anticipated closeness of the vote prior to division through interaction with the whips, this variable reflects the preliminary vote tallies taken by the whips prior to the bill. In other words, I expect that when the whips' preliminary tallies show the outcome will be close—and therefore consequential to the parties—the impact of MPs' party identification will be stronger, as MPs on the fence will be more likely to side with their party's unofficial position.

To determine whether the opposition vote share conditions the effects of party identification, I created interactions between this variable and the variables measuring the party affiliations of MPs. For Labour MPs, the negative effect of party identification on opposition to the HFEA on each division should intensify as the outcome becomes closer. We would expect to see the opposite effect among Conservative MPs, for whom the effect of party identification should increase their opposition to the HFEA as the outcome becomes

closer. While Liberal Democrat and Labour MPs may not differ significantly on divisions that were clearly destined not to pass, the argument above predicts that the effect of Liberal Democrat party identification will increase the probability that Liberal Democrats will vote to oppose Labour as the outcome becomes less certain, and thus more consequential for their party (i.e. increasing the chances of embarrassing the government).

To isolate the effects of party identification and the partisan context, I include several control variables. One variable captures the effect of the whip among Liberal Democrat MPs, who were whipped on the amendment vote seeking to require that a mother and father be present. This variable is coded one for Liberal Democrat MPs on this division as zero otherwise.

I also include several control variables to account for the impact of MPs' personal preferences. The primary explanation for the party cohesion observed on each amendment was that MPs voted according to their (shared) preferences regarding abortion and practices considered by opponents to be akin to abortion: those personally opposed to abortion voted to oppose the HFEA, whilst those supportive of abortion voted in support of the HFEA. The BRS contains a variable measuring MPs' attitudes towards the availability of abortion on the National Health Service. Using this variable, I created a dummy variable coded one for those opposed to abortion (those answering that they felt efforts to make abortion available on the NHS have gone 'too far' or 'much too far') and zero otherwise.[7]

Because the HFEA sought to recognise same-sex couples as legal parents of children conceived through donated reproductive material, MPs' attitudes regarding LGBT rights also might have affected their voting behaviour. To account for this possibility, I include a variable measuring negative attitudes towards the LGBT community. Those responding that efforts to recognise same-sex partnerships and give equal opportunities have gone 'too far' or 'much too far' are coded one (zero otherwise); these responses were then combined into an

additive scale ranging from zero to two, with higher values indicating more negative attitudes towards LGBT rights.

To a large extent, issues involving matters of personal choice like abortion are opposed by those on the authoritarian end of the libertarian-authoritarian scale. To account for this, I create an authoritarianism scale based on MPs' responses to six questions regarding: disrespect for traditional values among the youth, the need for stiffer criminal sentences, the need for the death penalty, the need for teaching children obedience, a duty to follow laws that are perceived as unjust, and the need for media censorship. MPs agreeing or strongly agreeing with each question were coded one (zero otherwise); these responses were then combined into an additive scale ranging from zero to six (low to high authoritarianism).

I include two variables measuring the personal characteristics of MPs. Because previous research notes that voting behaviour on free votes—including abortion issues—involves a gender dimension (Plumb 2013; *ibid* 2015; Warhurst 2008), I include a variable coded one for female MPs and zero otherwise. I also include a variable coded one for those MPs without a university education and zero for those having completed a university degree—though previous research has found little evidence that well-educated MPs (specifically, those educated in the sciences) voted against these amendments to a significantly greater extent than less-educated MPs (Goodwin 2015).

Finally, previous research suggests MPs may vote to represent the interests of their constituents (Pattie, Johnston, and Fieldhouse 1994; Pattie, Johnston, and Stuart 1998; Overby, Raymond, and Taydas 2011; Baumann, Debus, and Müller 2015a; *ibid* 2015b; Sieberer 2015). To account for the possibility that MPs from more religious constituencies may feel pressure to support the proposed amendments while MPs from more secular constituencies, I include a variable measuring the percentage of Christians in each constituency using census data taken from Norris (2005; *ibid* 2010). Additionally, given that

less electorally-secure MPs are more likely to exhibit constituency-focused behaviour (André, Depauw, and Martin 2015), MPs with smaller margins of victory (defined as MPs' vote percentages minus the second-placed candidate's share) may have been more likely to vote in favour of these measures than their more electorally secure counterparts.[8]

To facilitate comparison of the coefficients for variables like the constituency preference variables with the coefficients for the dummy variables, I follow the suggestion by Gelman (2008). For the scalar variables (except the opposition vote share variable, which I leave in its original scale for presentation purposes in figures plotting predicted probabilities), I subtract the mean from each variable before dividing by twice the standard error. This produces coefficients that are more directly comparable to those for the dummy variables.

Results

Because pooling MPs' votes means voting behaviour by the same MPs is likely correlated, I use generalised estimating equations logistic regression (assuming exchangeable correlation) to estimate MPs' voting behaviour.[9] Parameter estimates, as well as descriptive statistics for each variable, are presented in Table 2. Though the conditional nature of the effects of party identification makes it difficult to see whether these effects are influenced by the partisan context when looking at the parameter results, one should note that several control variables are statistically significant. As one would expect, attitudes against abortion are a strong predictor of opposition to the HFEA, as are higher values on the authoritarian scale. Because they were whipped, Liberal Democrats were significantly more likely to oppose the amendment requiring both a father and mother figure than other divisions. Finally, the variable measuring the percentage of Christians in each constituency also reaches statistical significance, suggesting that MPs were also pressured to vote in line with their constituents' preferences.

Table 2 about here

Even after controlling for these other factors, party identification had an effect—albeit conditioned by the partisan context—on support for/opposition to the HFEA. To see the estimated effects of party identification and the degree to which these effects are conditioned by the partisan context of the division, I examine the impact of votes essential to the ultimate passage of the HFEA. Table 3 presents predicted changes in probabilities (along with 95 percent confidence intervals) simulating the partisan context of divisions essential to the passage of the bill versus divisions deciding the amendments. All other variables are held at their median values.

Table 3 about here

The results show that the difference between amendments and the votes essential to the bill's passage produces significant differences in the estimated effects of Labour and Liberal Democrat party identifications. For both parties, the effect of party identification strengthens on passage votes relative to amendments: for Labour MPs, the negative effect of Labour identification on voting to oppose the HFEA becomes more negative on passage votes, while the small and insignificant positive effect of Liberal Democrat identification on opposition to the HFEA seen on amendments becomes a large and statistically significant effect on passage votes. Although the significant differences in the effects of Labour party identification between passage votes and amendments are to be expected given that Labour MPs were whipped on the three passage votes (though a number of MPs continued to defy the whip), the fact that the effect of party identification among Liberal Democrats—who were not whipped—strengthens on passage votes provides evidence that passage votes condition the effects of party identification. While the context of passage votes has little bearing on the estimated effects of Conservative party identification, the fact remains that the results in Table 3 suggest the partisan context created by divisions essential to final passage

significantly conditions the effect of party identification among Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs. Thus, the results suggest that on bills that can make or break a bill, the effects of party identification are stronger than on divisions where the partisan consequences of the vote are less severe.

We see similar evidence to suggest the partisan context moderates the effects of party identification when looking at the impact of the variable measuring the vote shares opposing the HFEA. Figures 1 and 2 present the predicted probabilities of voting to oppose the HFEA across the range of the vote share variable for each estimated party identification effect, holding all other variables at their median values.

Figures 1 and 2 about here

Looking at the effect of Labour party identification (Figure 1), although Labour MPs become somewhat more likely to oppose the HFEA as the anticipated outcome is more competitive, Labour MPs nonetheless remain less likely relative to Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs to oppose the HFEA and become increasingly less likely to oppose the HFEA relative to the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats as the anticipated outcome becomes more competitive. We see similar effects when comparing Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs on an individual basis to Labour MPs (Figure 2): as the outcomes of the divisions become closer (and thus more consequential to the parties), Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs both become increasingly likely to oppose the HFEA relative to Labour MPs. Taken together, these results provide evidence that the magnitude of the effects of party identification increase as the vote becomes closer. These findings are impressive because these figures represent the effect of party after controlling for the major alternative explanations of MPs' voting behaviour (personal preferences, the whips, and constituency pressures). In keeping with the expectations outlined above, the fact that the effects of party identification intensify as the vote becomes closer and more partisan provides evidence in

favour of the argument that the effects of party identification are conditioned by the partisan context of the vote.

In sum, these results suggest that differences in the partisan context significantly condition the impact of party identification on legislative voting behaviour. The results in Table 3 suggest the differences between amendments and the divisions more consequential to a bill's success increase the effects of party identification on MPs' voting behaviour. Furthermore, the results in Figures 1 and 2 suggest MPs of the same party also remain cohesive on free votes out of a sense of loyalty to the party in an effort to defeat the government or prevent one's own party from being defeated on amendments when the result is expected to be close.

Conclusion

Previous research examining the voting behaviour of MPs on un-whipped divisions concludes that 'party' continues to play an important role in deciding the outcomes of these divisions. Though most studies argue the reason parties continue to remain cohesive even when MPs are not compelled by their whips is because MPs of the same party share similar preferences (Hibbing and Marsh 1987; Marsh and Read 1988; Mughan and Scully 1997; Plumb 2013; *ibid* 2015), other research suggests that parties also remain cohesive due to their MPs' identification with and sense of the loyalty to the party (Russell 2014; Raymond and Overby 2016; Raymond and Worth, 2016). Until now, there had been insufficient evidence to draw wider generalisations regarding the effects of party identification across a broad range of divisions, as most of the evidence in favour of party identification effects had been derived from a handful of divisions.

To determine whether the effects of party identification on MPs' voting behaviour on free votes seen in previous research are generalisable, this paper tested an argument holding

that the effects of party identification are conditional on the partisan context in which votes are cast. Consistent with previous literature suggesting that MPs are more likely to vote along party lines independently of their personal preferences on divisions with the greatest partisan consequences (Cowley and Stuart 1997, pp. 124-125; *ibid* 2010, pp. 176-177; Overby, Tatalovich, and Studlar 1998), the analysis above suggests these findings are part of a broader phenomenon. Using 20 divisions regarding issues of embryology and abortion that were decided largely as free votes—and matching MPs' voting behaviour to survey measures of their personal preferences—the results suggest that MPs divide more clearly along party lines on the most consequential divisions for their parties. Net of the effects of MPs' personal and constituents' preferences, the closer the outcome of a vote on division—reflecting greater consequences for the parties—the stronger the effects of MPs' party identification. More hotly contested divisions were associated with stronger effects of Conservative and Liberal Democrat party identification—thereby increasing the likelihood that these parties' MPs would vote cohesively in order to oppose the HFEA (and by extension, oppose Labour as well). Additionally, the effects of party identification are stronger still on divisions that are more consequential to the outcome of the bill.

Thus, the findings presented here suggest that the effects of party identification on MPs' voting behaviour seen in previous research may be generalisable to voting behaviour on free votes more generally. Based on these findings, one would expect to observe party identification effects that are independent of MPs' personal and constituency preferences on divisions that have consequences for the parties and their agendas. On divisions with the greatest consequences for the parties (e.g. those divisions that are anticipated to be closer and more consequential to the final outcome), these results suggest party loyalties will play a considerable role in shaping MPs' voting behaviour. On divisions where the vote is less consequential to the parties, the effects of party identification will be weaker as MPs instead

vote primarily according to their personal and/or constituents' preferences. In applying the conclusions reached here to other free votes, the results above would predict that the arguments developed above should generalise to and explain not only why other free vote divisions appear increasingly divided along party lines (when the partisan stakes are higher, resulting in stronger party identification effects), but also those free votes that are less partisan (when the partisan stakes are lower). If confirmed in future research, these results may help us to understand why governments may be willing to proceed with legislation when they are compelled—whether by convention or by their backbenches—to release the whips and decide matters as free votes. Specifically, these results suggest that governments may be willing to proceed with controversial legislation crucial to their agendas that must be decided as free votes because the closeness of the vote will stimulate party loyalties that in turn can ensure a bill's passage.

Although the results of the analysis above are in line with expectations, a few words of caution regarding the conclusions reached above are in order. One important limitation of this study is that the evidence presented here is based on an analysis of only one issue (even if this one issue led to several divisions). Additionally, the analysis performed here examines the same divisions examined by previous research cited in the literature review used to develop the argument tested here (Cowley and Stuart 2010). While this latter issue is mitigated to a large extent by the fact that the analysis performed here offers a more systematic test of the hypothesised effects of the partisan context, the fact remains that additional research examining other data is needed to corroborate these findings. Despite this, the fact remains that the conclusions reached here are based on arguments that are designed to be generalisable (and whose implications are testable).

Looking towards future research, one way to expand on this study would be to examine other means of measuring partisan contexts. While the analysis above examines two

types of partisan contexts, there may be other partisan contexts that matter on other divisions. For instance, the effects of party identification may be weaker when MPs anticipate their parties will be divided internally (to a greater degree than was seen here), which in turn makes it harder to identify the 'party' to whom they should be loyal. Further analysis along these lines would help to determine the robustness of the findings presented here, as well as to develop theoretical expectations regarding the presence/absence of party-as-identification effects on MPs' voting behaviour.

Additionally, future research examining the relative effects of party identification and the whips is needed. It may be possible to generalise the effects of party identification to all divisions and not simply free votes—as previous research has done (van Vonno et al. 2014). While the effects of party identification on voting behaviour could be seen in the analysis presented here even after accounting for Labour's limited use of the whip on some divisions, future research on this topic is needed before concluding that party-as-identification effects are present on both un-whipped and whipped divisions—not least because generalisation beyond free votes is plagued by the possibility of selection effects resulting from party leaders' decisions to/not to whip their members (see Cowley and Stuart 2010, pp. 174, 181). That being said, the possibility of party identification effects on both whipped and un-whipped divisions offers exciting potential avenues for future research that deserve our attention.

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Table 1: Party breakdown of the percentages voting in favour of several divisions regarding the HFEA 2008

	Party			
Division	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	Combined
Second Reading	97% (95%)	44% (31%)	86% (100%)	81% (82%)
Ban creation of hybrid embryos	22% (22%)	55% (68%)	27% (11%)	34% (31%)
No mixing of human and animal gametes or pronuclei	22% (20%)	80% (90%)	46% (44%)	44% (42%)
Ban genetic modification for reproduction	22% (18%)	62% (80%)	37% (24%)	37% (35%)
Tissue typing only for medical cases	9% (7%)	76% (88%)	30% (22%)	32% (27%)
Tissue typing ban	19% (11%)	57% (72%)	22% (22%)	32% (28%)
'Saviour siblings' ban	19% (11%)	76% (89%)	41% (35%)	41% (34%)
Must be a father and mother	18% (11%)	92% (96%)	17% (7%)	43% (34%)
Must be a father or male role model	18% (11%)	92% (95%)	27% (13%)	43% (33%)
Limit abortion to 12 weeks from conception	6% (4%)	36% (44%)	6% (0%)	16% (12%)
Limit abortion to 16 weeks from conception	7% (4%)	42% (56%)	6% (0%)	18% (15%)
Limit abortion to 20 weeks from conception	15% (17%)	77% (87%)	24% (24%)	37% (36%)
Mandatory counselling	17% (17%)	70% (80%)	49% (47%)	36% (39%)
Limit abortion to 22 weeks from conception	20% (24%)	83% (88%)	42% (35%)	43% (43%)
Programming Motion	95% (93%)	27% (29%)	11% (13%)	67% (64%)
Treatment by cytoplasm only	18% (17%)	65% (76%)	90% (86%)	42% (47%)
No cell nuclear replacement	18% (16%)	76% (84%)	40% (21%)	41% (38%)
Ban tetraploid complementation	18% (14%)	73% (79%)	41% (14%)	39% (34%)
Disallow implantation of human gametes in animals	17% (12%)	72% (84%)	37% (8%)	37% (34%)
Third Reading	94% (98%)	38% (18%)	65% (85%)	73% (73%)

Entries are the percentages of all non-abstaining MPs voting 'aye' on each proposed amendment. For the sake of comparison, entries in parentheses are the percentages voting 'aye' according to the BRS sample.

Table 2: Generalised Estimating Equations Estimates of MPs' voting behaviour on the 20 HFEA 2008 divisions

Predictors	Model 1 B (SE)	Model 2 B (SE)	Mean (σ)
Party Identification			
Labour MPs	0.79 (0.90)		0.55 (0.50)
Conservative MPs		0.05 (0.97)	0.26 (0.44)
Lib Dem MPs		-2.83 (1.38)*	0.19 (0.40)
Partisan Contexts			
Passage votes	0.76 (0.30)*	-1.43 (0.47)**	0.14 (0.35)
Passage × Lab	-2.21 (0.56)**		0.08 (0.27)
Passage × Cons		1.44 (0.63)*	0.03 (0.18)
Passage × Lib Dem		3.04 (0.64)**	0.03 (0.16)
Opposition vote share	0.10 (0.01)**	0.04 (0.02)*	35.49 (8.07)
Vote Share × Lab	-0.06 (0.02)*		19.42 (18.59)
Vote Share × Cons		0.04 (0.02)+	9.21 (16.21)
Vote Share × Lib Dem		0.10 (0.03)**	6.86 (14.42)
Controls			
Lib Dem Whip	-2.45 (0.90)**	-2.62 (1.00)**	0.01 (0.10)
Oppose abortion	2.35 (0.31)**	2.27 (0.31)**	0.29 (0.45)
Negative LGBT attitudes	0.75 (0.38)*	0.48 (0.38)	0.00 (0.50)
Authoritarian scale	1.41 (0.30)**	1.24 (0.31)**	0.00 (0.50)
Female MPs	0.35 (0.31)	0.38 (0.31)	0.26 (0.44)
No university education	0.36 (0.46)	0.40 (0.46)	0.10 (0.30)
% Christian in constituency	1.06 (0.31)**	1.01 (0.31)**	0.00 (0.50)
MPs' Margins of victory	0.03 (0.30)	-0.02 (0.30)	-0.00 (0.50)
Constant	-4.60 (0.63)**	-3.80 (0.69)**	
Joint significance tests			
Margin × Labour MPs	25.39**		
Margin × Cons MPs		20.02**	
Margin × Lib Dem MPs		19.17**	
Passage × Labour MPs	15.31**		
Passage × Cons MPs		5.71+	
Passage × Lib Dem MPs		22.60**	
LR χ^2	163.05**	161.41**	
n MPs	103	103	
n Total	1625	1625	

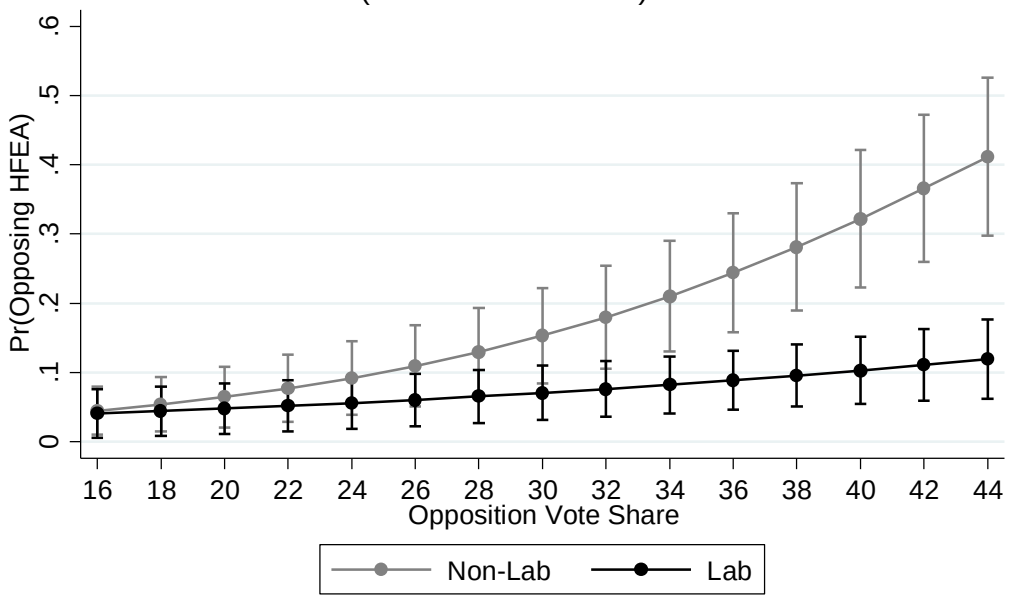
+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, two-tailed tests. Dependent variable is whether MPs voted for (1) or against the restrictive position (0). "Joint significance tests" refer to Chow tests of joint significance for each listed pair of variables.

Table 3: The estimated effects of party identification on voting to oppose the HFEA for each party—conditional on passage votes vs. amendments

Party	Estimated Effects	95% Confidence Intervals
Labour[1]		
Amendments	-0.22	(-0.34, -0.10)
Passage Votes	-0.35	(-0.54, -0.17)
Conservative[2]		
Amendments	0.24	(0.10, 0.38)
Passage Votes	0.31	(0.10, 0.52)
Lib Dem[2]		
Amendments	0.10	(-0.00, 0.20)
Passage Votes	0.52	(0.32, 0.73)

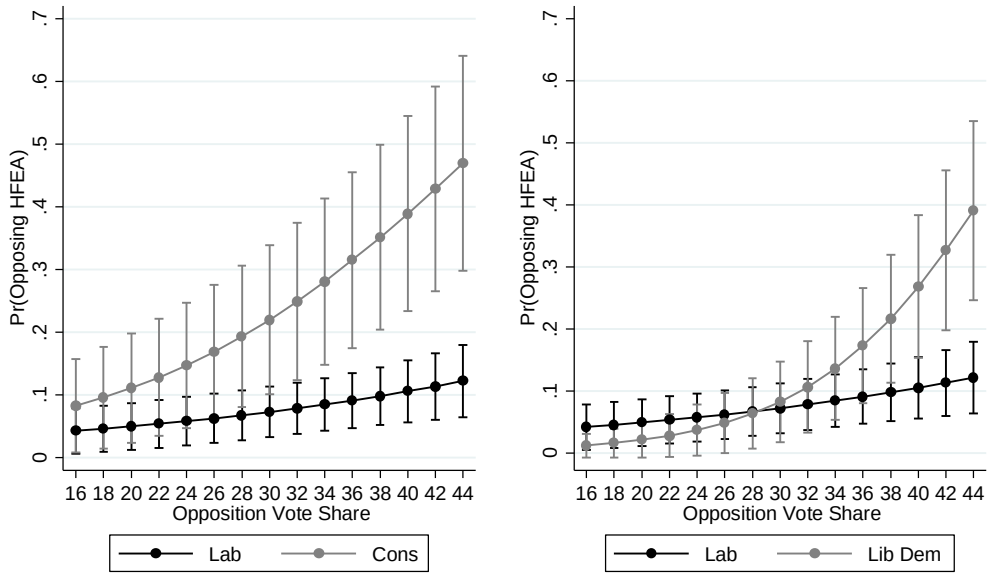
Entries are the predicted changes in probabilities (and 95% confidence intervals) associated with each party's MPs on amendments versus passage votes—holding all other variables at their median values. [1] uses results from model 1. [2] uses results from model 2.

Figure 1: Predicted Probabilities of Opposing the HFEA
(results from model 1)



Note: Entries are predicted probabilities of voting to oppose the HFEA (with 95% confidence intervals)

Figure 2: Predicted Probabilities of Opposing the HFEA
(results from model 2)



Note: Entries are predicted probabilities of voting to oppose the HFEA (with 95% confidence intervals)

[1] Although free votes are rare, previous research notes they are increasingly used on divisions deciding policy questions that are important to parties' agendas and are thus hardly inconsequential (Cowley and Stuart, 2010). Although one must be careful in generalising from free votes to voting behaviour more generally, this suggests the lessons learned by examining free votes may extend to other divisions.

[2] In addition to attempts to limit abortion, amendments were proposed to prevent the creation of hybrid embryos, to ban various forms of genetic modification (including tetraploid complementation assay), to prevent modification of the nucleus in fighting hereditary diseases, and to prevent the creation of so-called 'saviour siblings' (children conceived through in-vitro fertilisation in order to provide cells to be transferred to another child with certain diseases that can be cured via hematopoietic stem cell transplantation).

[3] While the BRS sample's roughly 16 per cent response rate (which is common for mail-back surveys like this) creates concerns regarding the representativeness of the House of Commons as a whole, the BRS sample nonetheless is also representative in terms of gender (24 per cent in the BRS sample versus 20 per cent in the full House), the mean percentage of Christians in the constituency (BRS: 70 per cent, Commons: 71 per cent), and the mean margin of victory in MPs' constituencies (BRS: 17 percent, Commons: 19 per cent). Although the percentage of MPs not having attended university is significantly higher than the BRS sample (BRS: 11 per cent, Commons: 28 per cent), the fact this variable does not have significant effects in the models estimated here suggests this discrepancy does not bias the conclusions reach here.

[4] Because some MPs voted on some amendments but not others, this suggests that some MPs absented themselves strategically. To account for this possibility, I also examined a multinomial measure including a third category for MPs who did not vote during the division yet were present on other divisions later that day. The results using this measure of the

dependent variable—estimated using multinomial logistic regression—produced results that were substantively equivalent to those presented here.

[5] No MPs from the nationalist or Northern Ireland parties were included in the model after including the variables gathered in BRS sample.

[6] Although higher levels of opposition to the HFEA increase the probability MPs will be divided along party lines, this variable remains conceptually distinct from the dependent variable, as higher levels of opposition to the HFEA do not necessarily reflect clearer partisan divides (e.g. when parties are internally divided).

[7] The results presented here appear robust when compared to a model using the original abortion attitudes scale ranging from one (much too far) to five (not nearly far enough), which omits those nine MPs who refused to answer or answered 'don't know'.

[8] Interactions between MPs' margins of victory and the dummy variable measuring Conservative MPs—accounting for the possibility Conservative MPs were less susceptible to constituency pressures due to their party's more socially conservative base relative to Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs—did not significantly improve model fit.

[9] The results presented in Table 2 are similar to GEE results assuming independent correlation, as well as results using population-averaged logistic regression and logistic regression with standard errors clustered by MP.